

# *Christian Thinking*

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Published by  
*Spiritbuilding Publishing*  
15591 N. State Rd. 9  
Summitville, IN 46070

Printed in the United States of America  
**CHRISTIAN THINKING**  
By Chad Sychtysz  
ISBN 978-0-9829811-9-1

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*Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life*



## *Acknowledgments*

In essence, I have been gathering notes for this book over the course of my 20+ years as a minister of the gospel. Many points in the topics covered here are drawn from my conversations with, observations of, and insightful contributions from a number of people. Some have contributed to this book knowingly, others unknowingly; thus, some I can acknowledge by name, others must be acknowledged anonymously. In particular, I want to express my appreciation to Curtis and Patsy Cantwell for their having read through the finished manuscript (more than once) in order to clean it up and make it shine. I am (again) indebted to and appreciative of Carl “Mac” McMurray at Spiritbuilding Publishing for continuing to support my writing ministry. No single person has gone out on a limb for me more than he has. Jamey Hinds deserves my sincere thanks for taking my raw manuscript and turning it into something presentable. I am always thankful for my family’s encouragement to write, including my church “family” that often endures the often-unscripted original classes and talks that inspire books like this in the first place. I especially want to thank my wife, Honey, for always being there, no matter when and no matter what.

I believe that God has blessed me with a talent to write. There are many and far better writers out there, and I am fully (and painfully) aware of this. Nonetheless, it has been a driving passion of mine to use *my* God-given gift to help people draw near to the Father and His Son, and to teach the Word of God as effectively and accurately as I am capable of doing. Therefore, I am humbly and profoundly grateful to God for blessing me, using me in His service, and allowing me to honor Him in this special way.



*This book is dedicated to Honey,  
my wife and best friend.*

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# Introduction

What is “Christian thinking”? Two passages immediately come to my mind. One is a bit involved:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

The other is much shorter: “For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Galatians 6:3). Both passages say something very significant regarding the method and content of Christian thinking. First, Christians ought to know of and be thinking about God in the manner in which He has revealed Himself in His Word as well as the internalization of the Word itself.<sup>1</sup> Second, a person can be seriously mistaken about what (or how) he thinks if indeed he has abandoned this first principle.

Christian thinking is not just “thinking about God,” dwelling on good things, or reading the Bible. In essence, it is the process in which we give Christ *full controlling interest* over how we think and what we think about with the expressed purpose of having “the mind of Christ.” If we are taught by Christ, then we will think like He wants us to think. If we are led by Him, then we will go where He wants us to go. If we truly allow Him to *train* us (as His disciples), then we will increasingly become more like Him (the Master). This is what Paul is saying in the first passage I cited.



Having the *mind* of Christ—thinking like He has taught us to think—necessarily requires a basic understanding of that thinking process. Certainly “thinking” involves attitude, perspective, objectivity, etc. These are all subjects that I cover initially in this book. But this thinking also leads us into other dimensions of the life of a believer: love, discipleship, servitude, gratitude, and change. These are also subjects that I cover in this book. In other words, we begin with more of a conceptual approach, but we must not leave it there. Eventually—and sooner than later—all Christian thinking must manifest itself in a visible and practical manner. What holds all this together is *truth*, which is appropriately in this book’s middle section.

But Paul also says something about a “natural man.” This refers to the unconverted person who thinks like the world has taught him to think. He is a product of his own secular society; he has been conditioned—even indoctrinated—by the various beliefs and reasoning stratagems of unconverted and godless men and women. He *could* become a Christian and thus begin the journey toward the Light (John 3:18-21), but he remains as yet an enemy of God and “hostile” to Him (Romans 8:6-8). Instead of being illuminated with heavenly truth, his heart is flooded with the world’s darkness and deception. Thus, the Spirit of God is “foolishness” to him, because he thinks himself to be wiser than God and exempt from accountability to Him. While identifying this person and his beliefs is not my main objective in this book, it is at times unavoidable. I have tried to limit such discussion to comparisons (“This is how the world thinks” vs. “This is how a Christian thinks”) rather than making this a separate issue of its own. Regardless, the conclusions concerning the “natural man” will be, I believe, self-evident.

Less obvious is the “natural man” who masquerades as a Christian, but who has never really let go of his unchristian or unbiblical beliefs. He seeks association with believers but is not yet a true believer himself, since he continues to think like unbelievers. He thinks he is “something,” but actually deceives himself because he measures himself

by a false or corrupted standard (2 Corinthians 10:12, 18). The “spirit of the world” cannot train one to think like Christ. The carnal, self-serving, and satanic spirit that pervades the realm of all unbelievers cannot and will not draw people to God. Christians who try to balance upon a “thin line” (as they see it) between an allegiance to Christ and any allegiance to the world are deceiving themselves, because it is impossible to maintain this; “No one can serve two masters ...” (Matthew 6:24). However, it is very true that the satanic world exerts a powerful and wicked influence upon *all* Christians, and thus is something that we must strive to resist. Thus, this book is written with these two purposes in mind: first, to focus very specifically on what it means to think like Christ; and second, to expose some of the false beliefs that are antagonistic to this thinking and have corrupted the minds of believers.

The title of the book as well as its subject matter requires a specific definition of what a Christian really is (and is not). At the risk of already losing you as a reader, I am morally compelled to provide this information. You may not like what you are about to read, yet I am unable to avoid it and you would be unwise to do so. The New Testament does not recognize *as* Christians those who:

- ❑ Think they are Christians, but have not yet obeyed the method of *becoming* one as specifically instructed in the gospel of Christ.
- ❑ Have merely “asked Jesus into [their] heart” or subscribed to any other conversion method foreign to the New Testament.
- ❑ Think they are Christians by association (by being married to a Christian, having friends who are Christians, having been “born and raised in the church,” etc.).
- ❑ Assume that churchgoing or church membership is interchangeable with holy fellowship with God in Christ.
- ❑ Have willfully refused to repent of any sinful behavior that they practiced before making a verbal commitment to follow Christ.
- ❑ Regard themselves as Christians “at heart,” but not in actual allegiance to Christ.

- ❑ Think being a “good person” is tantamount to being a Christian “in spirit.”

I have read many books written by Christians (and those who call themselves Christians, but have succumbed to one of the errors just mentioned). A number of these spend a great deal of time talking about *being* a Christian, but provide little or no biblical information on *becoming* one. It is amazing to me that the most important aspect of one’s walk with God—the genuine *beginning* of it!—is so often overlooked, while the rest of one’s “walk” is then assumed to be true without any reference to the facts. Having said that, the New Testament *does* recognize as Christians<sup>2</sup> those who:

- ❑ Hear the gospel of Christ and believe it to be true (Romans 10:17). The New Testament does not describe a single person who became a Christian apart from hearing and then obediently accepting the terms and conditions put forward in the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Ephesians 1:13-14, Colossians 1:3-6, et al).
- ❑ Believe that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God *and* the world’s Redeemer—the Christ of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:44-48, John 20:31).
- ❑ Believe that Christ was crucified as an atoning sacrifice for their sins (1 Peter 3:18) and literally rose from the dead (Romans 10:9-10).
- ❑ Put their faith in—and thus entrust their soul to—Christ as their Savior (Hebrews 11:6).
- ❑ Obey Christ’s commandments as a demonstration of faith and love in Him (John 14:15, 1 John 2:3-6).
- ❑ Take responsibility for (i.e., confess and repent of) their sins (Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:6-10).
- ❑ Are baptized into Christ: in obedience to the biblical command (Acts 2:38); to die to their “old” life (Colossians 2:11-12); to unite with Him in the likeness of His death (Romans 6:3-7, 2 Timothy 2:11); and to have their conscience cleansed (1 Peter 3:21).<sup>3</sup>
- ❑ Pledge their fidelity to Christ through self-denial, discipleship, and self-sacrifice (Matthew 16:24).

Not just some or most of these are required, but *all* of them. It does no good to take issue with me personally on any of these points. I did not come up with them; they are put forward in the gospel of Christ. My plea is that a person will have the faith and courage to evaluate himself in light of what is written in the Word of God rather than close his heart *to* that truth because he is upset with me.

Assuming that you are still with me ...

I realize that “Christian” is ideally a *person*, not an adjective, but sometimes it is necessary to use this word to describe what Christian’s *do* rather than only who they *are*. Thus, “Christian thinking” most certainly defines the *kind* of thinking that Christians are to engage in. It is true that atheists and agnostics can think like Christians for the sake of understanding where we are coming from (if they find it necessary to do so), but these remain incidental and temporary excursions into the mind of the believer, not convictions of the heart. In the end, such people usually remain atheists and agnostics; thankfully, a few of them abandon such hopeless ideologies and become Christians. Once any person becomes a Christian, he obligates himself to Christ—not just to take on His name or support His cause, but (as Paul said) to “have the mind of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:16).

This book is a huge expansion of a class I taught in 2013. As we went through that study, I was impressed by how much of our everyday *lifestyle* as Christians is forged by the *thinking process* that we have adopted—whether good or bad, positive or negative. This is hardly a novel observation, yet it was one that I myself had not specifically developed into a book format. Instead of merely writing it as a book, however, I wanted to keep the question-and-answer format at the end of each section to involve the reader more personally and promote dialogue within group studies.

This book is also considered “Part Two” of a “Fundamentals of Faith” teacher/tutorial program that I had written several years earlier.<sup>4</sup> “Part

One” of that work focused on laying the necessary groundwork for becoming a Christian, but it lacked adequate information about what to do *after* that decision. So then, it seemed good to me to tackle two objectives at once: fulfill a suitable ending to the “Fundamentals of Faith” project; and provide a readable and practical guide to “how to think like a Christian.”

In writing this book, I purposely drew from a number of different sources—old and new, conservative and not-so-conservative, scholarly and simple language. My having cited from a particular author does not for a moment mean that I agree with all of that person’s religious convictions, but it does not mean that I entirely disagree with them, either. I learned a long time ago to keep the wheat and pitch the chaff—or, in this case, to quote what is good and usable and simply let the rest go. It is not my intention to scrutinize the beliefs of every person whom I quote, only that I represent his (or her) words accurately and use them in a way that contributes effectively to what I am writing. I trust that other authors will do the same with my own written work.

I hope you will find this book very helpful to you personally. If you are using it as a study guide for group study, I hope it will contribute to a better understanding of Christian thinking for all of those involved. Feedback is always welcome; you can contact me directly at *chad@booksbychad.com*.

Chad Sychtysz

May, 2015

# Section One: The Attitude of a Believer

## What Is Your Attitude?

A fundamental component of a successful Christian life is a godly attitude. Fellowship with God—either now or in the hereafter—is impossible without it. Having said that, Christians tend to place great value on this (“Attitude is everything!”) yet proportionately very little on what *formats* or *determines* attitude. There is no question that attitude is important, especially with regard to one’s spiritual welfare. Yet, efforts to improve one’s attitude without revealing and addressing those factors that *create* an improved attitude are pointless. This study will ultimately explore those factors. We will begin this study, however, by looking at “attitude” in a very general sense without regard to specific religious beliefs.

Attitude can be defined as “a series of thoughts that are connected to a feeling, or vice versa. It is the repetitive cycle of thinking and feeling, feeling and thinking.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, attitude is made up of two basic parts: what you think about (i.e., your thoughts) and how you feel (i.e., your emotions). This is also referred to as your state of mind, mindset, mental disposition, heart (in a figurative sense), or personal outlook. In the ancient world, one’s “attitude” referred to his physical posture as he presented himself before his god, whether standing, bowing, kneeling, or lying prostrate.<sup>6</sup> This idea is still embedded in the modern usage of the word: one’s attitude describes, in essence, his *mental posture* toward a given person, subject, experience, or life in general. To “fall upon one’s knees,” for example, depicts not only one’s physical posture in prayer but also the humble inclination of his heart (as in Ephesians 3:14). Likewise, to stand erect with one’s neck stiffened and chin thrust upward is a physical posture that also depicts the defiance and insubordination of that person’s heart (as in Acts 7:51).

“Thoughts” refer to what you put into your head *and* how you process that information (whether positively or negatively, objectively or

subjectively, and/or truthfully or imaginatively). You think a certain way or about certain things because you *choose* to do so; or, because of earlier choices, you have been essentially *programmed* to do so. In most cases, it is the individual himself who programs his own thinking. Whatever a person thinks about is a window into that person's true nature or identity. A man of the world may have good thoughts from time to time, but he does not have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16); a Christian may think bad thoughts from time to time, but his habit is to dwell upon the things of God (Philippians 4:8).

What a person thinks about ultimately determines the outcome (or "fruit") of his behavior and his words (Matthew 12:33-37). The one who is pure has filled his heart with pure thoughts; the one who is "defiled and unbelieving" has filled his heart with corruptive thoughts and wicked imaginations (Mark 7:20-23, Titus 1:15-16). "Internal character dictates what we ultimately choose to do. *If we have problems in our heart, no amount of trying to make right choices will produce good fruit in us.*"<sup>7</sup> (We will later discuss this "fruit" in detail.)

One's *general* attitude, however, has a much broader meaning and application. It is not limited to a particular time or incident, but describes one's overall disposition toward the social and political environment in which he lives, authority figures (including God), and/or the world as a whole. One's attitude is the product of (but is not entirely defined by):

- ❑ **Personal knowledge:** facts, information, education, life experiences.
- ❑ **Temperament:** what kind of personality one has generally.
- ❑ **Beliefs:** family, cultural, religious, philosophic, traditional, etc.
- ❑ **Thought content:** what a person thinks about (or, what he puts into his head).

We should not confuse attitude with one's personal mood. "Mood" refers to one's mental and emotional disposition at a given moment. This can fluctuate due to the given situation or set of circumstances in

which that person finds himself. Weather, physical health, favorable (or unfavorable) circumstances, financial status, job status, etc., can all affect one's daily mood. Mood and attitude are certainly related—the one affects the other—but mood is far more incidental rather than general. A person may have a certain attitude for years; but his mood may change daily or weekly.

Some have likened attitude to a kind of map of the mind that observes and reflects the “territory” of human action. We allude to this when we use expressions like one's “frame of reference” or “way of thinking.” This “frame” or “way” concerns itself not only with one's view of reality—in essence, that *person's* reality, as he thinks it exists—but also his beliefs about how things ought to be—in essence, his personal policy system for the world. The accuracy of this map, however, may vary greatly from person to person.<sup>8</sup>

Attitude can also be defined as a pre-determined way of thinking that dictates one's present behavior. The attitude that you program in your head *today* will dictate how you act (or react) *tomorrow*. This attitude will either work *for* or *against* you (in achieving what is in your best interest), depending on whether or not it is consistent with what is in your soul's best interest. Attitudes can also be understood as cyclic or habitual patterns of thinking that are formed over a long period of time. “Patterns of thinking are so deeply ingrained in our hearts that we hardly even notice them. We get so used to reacting a certain way that our choices become automatic, and in time we cease to see them as actual choices.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Christian's* attitude—one expected of a follower of Christ (as opposed to that of an unbeliever)—is tempered or conditioned by his regard for his Lord rather than the details of his physical life. His devotion to Christ and high regard for the Word of God establish a mental disposition that transcends his earthly circumstances. Ideally, this attitude is in harmony with Christ: “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:5; see also



Romans 15:5-6 and Philippians 3:15-16).<sup>10</sup> It is, of course, impossible to have a godly attitude until one is fully committed to God's *truth*. It is not uncommon for religious people to focus on a "good attitude" but focus relatively little on divinely-revealed truth. We will have much to say about this in the coming chapters.

## The Importance (and Limitation) of Knowledge

Knowledge always precedes learning, and learning precedes attitude and (then) trained behavior. One's attitude will be conditioned by what he knows, but it is not equal to what he knows. Knowledge is an acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation.<sup>11</sup> It is not a replacement for righteousness, nor does it align a person's heart with God independent of other factors. Certainly not all knowledge is profitable:

- ❑ The (pre-Christian) ancients studied all kinds of scientific, mathematic, and astronomical knowledge, but this knowledge did not bring them closer to God or deliver them from paganism and idolatry.
- ❑ The Ephesian sorcerers had all sorts of books filled with (allegedly) magical and secret information of the occult, but when they became Christians they consigned this collection of knowledge to the flames because it was now useless to them (Acts 19:18-20).
- ❑ Many men in Paul's day sought human "philosophy" [lit., the love of wisdom], but this was grossly inferior to the revealed Word (*Logos*) of God in the Person of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:8-10; see John 1:1-3).
- ❑ Some of the Judaizing teachers of Paul's day dabbled in angelology—the study of angels and angelic mediation—but such elaborate pursuits did not give them any advantage with regard to salvation (Colossians 2:18-19).
- ❑ The elitist Gnostics [from *gnosis*, "knowledge" or "(an) understanding"] of the first century sought righteousness through

intellectualism and the possession of (what they believed was) secret and mystical information, but this could not atone for their sins or transform their hearts.

- ❑ Jesus referred to “the deep things of Satan” in Thyatira (Revelation 2:24), but this information did not profit those who studied it—and it offered nothing in the way of spiritual salvation. In fact, it had the complete opposite effect.
- ❑ Likewise, today’s secular world boasts of excelling in all sorts of knowledge, and we are allegedly living in an “Information Age.” Yet, not even the accumulation of or immediate access to all of this knowledge can offer the human soul what the revealed Word of God alone is able to provide. Furthermore, despite our lightning-fast access to untold volumes of information, our society is becoming increasingly immoral and antagonistic toward God and Christians.

The Christian faith is established upon the information that God has revealed in His Word, the Bible. This information provides the basis *for* faith, but it does not actually *produce* faith. An atheist can read the same Scripture that a believer reads, yet he may remain an atheist; despite such excellent knowledge, his regard for God may not change at all. Likewise, ancient Israel heard “good news” from God (in the Law of Moses), yet many Israelites did not exercise faith *in* Him. As a result, they forfeited what was promised them (Hebrews 4:1-2).

In response to the question of *how much* knowledge is needed as a foundation for one’s faith in God, there is no static or universal answer. The Book of Acts shows men and women with various levels of education all being taught the same gospel, and all who became Christians by obeying that gospel in the same way (or method). Clearly, one must have sufficient knowledge to be able to answer the basic questions concerning his convictions: 1) What do I believe? 2) Why do I believe it? 3) Is what I believe able to withstand objective criticism? 4) Does my belief system serve my very best interest, as measured over time)? and 5) Does my belief system serve the very

best interests of all other people with whom I come into contact, as measured over time? John Piper has this to say:

There is no necessary correlation between extensive learning and the right use of the mind. Many PhDs think poorly, and many people with little formal education think with great clarity and depth. I am pleading for a hearty engagement of the mind in the pursuit of God. I am not pleading mainly for more formal education. That may or may not be good in different cases. But the right use of the mind is always good no matter how much or how little education one has.<sup>12</sup>

Christians regularly assemble together in order to gain or refine biblical knowledge. This accumulated knowledge, however, does *nothing* for the improvement of one's attitude *or* life conduct until it is united with personal faith and (thus) put into appropriate practice. In other words, knowledge that does not bring a person closer to a known and beneficial goal is of little value to anyone, including the person who possesses it. More specifically, no one can achieve a godly attitude by knowledge alone. Furthermore, no one will find favor *with* or salvation *from* God based upon knowledge alone. Yet it remains unquestionably true that no one can be saved *by* God until he comes to *know* Him—not just know *about* Him but also to have fellowship *with* Him.

## **What do *you* think?**

- 1.) How important do you believe one's mental disposition is with regard to his or her success as a Christian?
- 2.) If *God* is very concerned with what you *think*—i.e., what is going on in your head—then should *you also* be very concerned about this? Please discuss.
- 3.) If your attitude is not based solely upon an accumulation of knowledge, then what good is it to have knowledge—especially the knowledge of God's Word?
- 4.) Please read Colossians 1:9-12. What is the goal of knowledge?
  - a. Do we act alone (in whatever we do for God), or is He involved in whatever we do for Him?
  - b. How does this passage help to establish an appropriate *attitude* for Christians?